Jeremias's commentary on the book of Amos joins his commentary on Hosea in the ATD series and takes a similar approach. Jeremias sees the book of Amos as the result of a process of redactional shapings and supplementations designed to emphasize certain elements of the message of Amos or to recontextualize them to suit changed or changing circumstances.

According to Jeremias, the visions--the oldest section in the book and thus key both to understanding the message of the book and to unraveling the history of its composition--indicate a change in the prophet's attitude toward Israel's prospects. Initially optimistic that the impending catastrophe could be averted through prophetic intercession, Amos can be seen coming in the visions to a sense that Israel's guilt overburdened God's patience. All other texts in the book presuppose that this change in Amos's thinking has already taken place.

The oracles concerning foreign nations at the beginning of the book, for example, end with the contention that just as God holds foreign nations accountable, he holds the chosen people to an even higher standard. The tradents of the middle section (Amos 3-6) applied this claim to the concept of election. In this context, the book addresses three major problems: (1) the life of luxury made possible for the upper class by their oppression of the poor, (2) the corruption of Israel's system of justice through bribery, and (3) the people's erroneous confidence in pilgrimages and ostentatious worship. No passage in the book supports the notion that Amos entertained any hope that Israel might be spared (9:8-15 is post-exilic; 5:15 offers only a limited hope).

Jeremias argues that the oldest book of Amos was not simply a collection of prophetic sayings, but an artful composition. The oracles concerning Israel's neighbors (Amos 1-2) and the vision reports (Amos 7-9) constitute a framework of five strophes each, two pairs
with a concluding, intensifying single strophe. A series of allusions link the two compositions very closely. In addition to being paired and demonstrating Amos’s developing awareness of the severity of the situation, the visions are unique in several respects. There is no interpreting angel, Amos is not commissioned, and they do not stand at the beginning of the book. The middle section (Amos 3-6) divides into two subsections of roughly equal length marked by the superscriptions in Amos 3:1 and 5:1. The first superscription introduces divine speech against the people; the second, prophetic speech against the state. In addition to this linear structure, the central chapter (Amos 5) is very artificially shaped as a "ring composition." In it offers of life twice interrupt the relationship between serious guilt and the penalty of death. This structure was probably intended to lighten the burden on the survivors of the northern catastrophe. These two structural principles--linear and concentric--can also be seen in subsequent materials. The two Woes (5:18-27; chap. 6) parallel one another (woes against self-confidence--5:18-20//6:1-7; divine statement against Israel's conduct--5:21-24//6:8-11; a question--5:25[26*]//6:12-13; and the sentence of exile--5:27//6:14). The two collections with accusations against the upper class of the city of Samaria (3:9-4:3; chap. 6) are grouped as a framework around the central chapter.

This structure results in a series of modifications to the message of Amos. First, sayings originally aimed at specific groups are now directed to the whole people. Second, at key points, the tradients of the book formulated sayings strongly influenced by the Hosea tradition (e.g., Amos 3:2; 5:25*; 6:8; 2:8; 7:9). These allusions were meant to indicate that Amos should be read as a companion to Hosea. Third, the central placement of Amos 5 heightens the significance of the theme of justice.

This oldest book of Amos underwent a series of revisions and expansions. In the next century, the message and prophetic role of the book was extended and emphasized by additions in Amos 3:3-8; 6:8-10; 8:3-5, 4-7, 9-10; 2:8; 7:9, 10-17. After the fall of Jerusalem, two related layers of material were added to the book. One layer manifesting affinity with deuteronomistic theology anchors the guilt of the people in salvation history (2:4, 10; 3:1b, 14; 5:6, 26; 8:14) and elevates the value of the prophetic word (2:11-12; 3:7; 8:11-12). A second revision influenced by exilic penitential worship (4:6-13) contributed hymns that constitute the outer framework (1:2; 9:5-6) and substantive center (4:13; 5:8-9) of the book. The post-exilic period struggled with the question of salvation after punishment and contributed Amos 9:7-10, 11-15. Amos 9:12-13 fulfills the additional role of relating Amos as a component of the Book of the Twelve to the books of Joel and Obadiah.

In this commentary Jeremias offers a thorough redaction-critical analysis of Amos, demonstrating, at the same time, a particular sensitivity to questions of literary style and structure. There are no methodological innovations or startling new claims or insights. Instead, Jeremias presents here a fine synthetic statement of redaction-critical scholarship on Amos very much in keeping with his earlier work on Hosea. As he did in the earlier
work, he focuses here on the growth of the prophetic tradition as a process of selection, authentication, and actualization. He is to be congratulated for clarity and rigor. (5/97)